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La. hero's statue gets home at Kidd

By **MARLENE NAANES**
 Advocate staff writer

Patrick Taylor brought a hero home in hopes of giving young Louisianians someone to look up to.

The New Orleans business executive and philanthropist funded the erection of a statue of Lt. Gen. John Lejeune, who many people believe brought the Marine Corps into the 20th century. Taylor funded seven statues throughout the country, including the newest one dedicated Thursday afternoon at the USS Kidd and Nautical Center.

"I think the young people will know his legacy, and the message will be you can be what you want to be," he said.

Lejeune was born in 1867 in New Roads, attended LSU and graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy. He joined the Marines, served in World War I and later developed land and water operations as a high-ranking officer to keep the Marines as a working part of the military.

Lejeune died in 1942.

Air Force cadets from LSU said they found a role model in Lejeune, whose name adorns a North Carolina Marine Corps installation. Many call him the "greatest Marine."

"I think it's significant that someone from New Roads could be so influential," said Mike Holtz, a senior Air Force cadet from Opelousas.

The cadets said they take a lot of Lejeune's personality traits, such as leadership, integrity and dedication, to heart during their training.

"Those traits are going to make you in life," said Josh Nuccio, a senior cadet from Mandeville.

Military service gives young people the discipline to shape their futures, Taylor said.

"The Marine Corps is the most highly respected federal establishment," he

said. "The corps changed my life."

Taylor said although his experience in the Marines was brief, he gained the confidence he needed to graduate from college and own a business. He took platoon and officer's training courses at LSU, but was discharged because of a weak heart.

"They took a scared little kid and made something of him," he said. "Our young people have the intelligence to succeed, but by challenging them, we raise their self-esteem."

The young cadets agreed, saying the difference between a freshman cadet and a senior cadet is overwhelming.

"They're very timid at first," said senior cadet Josh Blakeman of freshman cadets. "Throughout the program they'll be able to lead people."

The cadets said they would keep Lejeune's legacy in mind and hoped to have as successful a career. Lejeune served 40 years, working his way from midshipman to lieutenant general and serving as the 13th commandant of the Marine Corps.

Nuccio said he would like to be successful in the Air Force, but he will not necessarily look for the same fame.

"My goal is to serve my country as long as it lets me," he said.

Learning how past heroes changed history also gives young men and women in the military inspiration and a sense of patriotism, Nuccio said.

"It makes us appreciate what the veterans have done for us and gives us pride for us to continue on and serve our country," he said.

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